

What's That You're Eating?

If we really are what we eat, we probably don't know ourselves as well as we think. This month, Pip Taylor shines a spotlight on some of the ingredients used in sports foods and roles that they play.

Words: Pip Taylor | Images: Supplied

I believe it is always best to eat foods that are unpackaged and unprocessed. But sports foods do have an important role to play, especially for those key workouts and on race day, where convenience, portability and concentrated sources of fuel are vital for optimal performance. What you choose may come down to taste, texture, what sits comfortably in your stomach or whatever comes free in your race sample bag. But if you're anything like me, you won't be able to help turning over the packet and reading the ingredient list. Have you ever wondered what some of those mysterious-sounding ingredients are? Or what they are doing in your food?

Next time, read the back of the label and see if you can identify the ingredients. Here are a couple of common ones you might find:

Fructose: This is the sugar found naturally in fruit. It is intensely sweet and often used in sports foods. This is due to the uptake mechanism and that how we metabolise it is different from glucose, meaning more can be consumed before feelings of fullness are triggered.

Dextrose: This is a simple sugar and another name for glucose that is often derived from corn. Rapidly digested and absorbed, dextrose provides a source of quick energy.

Modified corn starch: This is used as a thickening agent and derived from corn starch that has been physically altered in order to give different properties and change its texture or how it acts when frozen, heated or combined with other ingredients.

Soy lecithin: This is used as an emulsifier. For example, in products like chocolate it is used to stop the cocoa and cocoa fat from separating. Lecithins are naturally oily substances found in plants like soybeans and in egg yolks. Soy lecithin is extracted from soybeans usually as a by-product of soybean oil production.

Rice syrup: Another form of sugar, this sweetener is made by cooking down rice to release the starches and produce a sweet syrup. It is fructose free, which is good news for those who cannot tolerate fructose.

Vegetable glycerine: This is an industrially produced carbohydrate made from vegetable oils. Often used in foods as a sweetener, it has fewer calories than sugar and is also used to keep foods moist due to its chemical structure. You also find glycerin in household



substances such as soaps, lotions and cosmetics.

Pantothenic acid: also known as vitamin B5, pantothenic acid is a component of an essential coenzyme (coenzyme A, CoA), which is required for chemical reactions that generate energy from food.

Calcium caseinate: This protein is derived from the casein in skim milk. Often added to recovery sports foods and supplements, casein is absorbed more slowly than whey protein but provides a source of amino acids and increases satiety or feelings of fullness.

Maltitol syrup: This is a low-carb sweetener made from sugar alcohols and is most often found in sugar-free or low-sugar/low-carb products. Large amounts of maltitol may cause diarrhea or other gastrointestinal complaints in some people.

Carnauba wax: This wax is refined from the leaves of a certain palm tree. In food it is used as a glazing agent to give products a glossy finish and texture. You might also find carnauba wax as a coating on your dental floss, in many cosmetics and in furniture and car polish. While eating polish might not sound enticing, it is non-toxic.

Carrageenan: This is an extract from red seaweed that, when added to foods, can stop them separating and enhance the mouth feeling of thickness or creaminess, especially in low fat products. While it is a natural product, it has been linked with gastrointestinal inflammation in some studies so sensitive individuals might need to beware.

Sodium citrate: This form of sodium is added as an electrolyte to replace salt lost through sweating. Often claimed as easier on the stomach than other sodium sources and less 'salty'-tasting than other forms.

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Chicken Rice Paper Rolls

PIP'S TIP

Rather than cracking open another recovery bar, try whipping up these chicken rice paper rolls. They are quick to make either post workout or beforehand and store in the fridge. They deliver a serve of protein and carbs along with far more nutrients than you can get from a packaged bar. Experiment with the fillings – use grilled beef or prawns and change up the veggies and herbs.

RECIPES

Ingredients

- 1 skinless chicken breast (200g) without skin boiled/steamed and shredded
- 1 cup coriander leaves
- 1 cup Vietnamese mint, finely shredded
- 1 cup Chinese cabbage, finely shredded
- 1 cup carrot, finely grated
- 1 cup cooked vermicelli noodles
- 8 rice paper rolls (small)

Method

Soak each rice paper roll in a flat bowl separately in warm water until translucent. Carefully lift the rice paper onto a flat surface such as a chopping board.

At one end of the rice paper, place a small amount of coriander leaves and Vietnamese mint. Place some chicken, vermicelli noodles, cabbage and carrot on top. Carefully pick up the end of the rice paper roll and fold over once. Fold in the edges either side.

Serve with your favourite sauce. Can be refrigerated before serving.

SERVES 4



Berry Yogurt Smoothie

PIP'S TIP

Recovery shakes might be beneficial post workout but there is nothing stopping you making your own with far fewer ingredients that will do the job just as well. Use full-fat yoghurt and milk for more flavour and improved fat composition (research shows that full-fat dairy is better for you than skim even when it comes to weight loss) and add in a scoop of whey protein to boost recovery. You could also use nut butter instead of the almond meal and change up the berries according to what's in season or on hand (frozen berries work just as well, too). Smoothies also work as a quick pre workout fuelling when a solid meal is going to be too heavy.

SERVES 1



Ingredients

- 1 cup blueberries (fresh or frozen)
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 1 small banana (fresh or frozen)
- 1 tbs almond butter
- 1 tsp honey (optional)

Method

Throw all ingredients into a blender and blitz until blended. 🍷



Pip Taylor is an elite triathlete and qualified nutritionist